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ABSTRACT

A study examined the genesis or formation and operations of the Communication Skills Project (COMSKIP), whose primary aim was to revitalize the teaching and learning in the Use of English (UOE) curriculum in Nigeria. In the process of accessing the achievements of COMSKIP, there was limited synchronicity between the people who conceived of the program and those who executed it, and COMSKIP failed to address the already existing problems of UOE. Other problems that plagued COMSKIP and militated against its complete success included a lack of understanding on the part of the initiators of the program of the social milieu, and the use of double standards in their operations. Nevertheless, COMSKIP's success include the following achievements: (1) succeeded in boosting the morale of the UOE teachers; (2) created a national awareness of the herculean tasks involved in the teaching of communication skills in a depressed economy; (3) articulated the tremendous prospects and promise which a revived UOE curriculum holds for the Nigerian undergraduate; and (4) laid the foundation for collaboration amongst UOE teachers. For a more effective UOE operation and lasting impact of COMSKIP, findings suggest the following: having a good pedagogic philosophy for the program; organizing a strong UOE teachers education program; and founding a center for English Language Studies. In addition, findings suggest that the idea of whole language be tried particularly in the areas of collaborative learning, portfolio assessment, workshop model and students' self monitoring. Contains 35 references. (Author/RS)

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COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS PROJECT: WHAT REALLY WENT WRONG

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A B S T R A C T

This paper tried to look into the genesis or formation and operations of COMSKIP. An objective evaluation was made as to how far COMSKIP was able to achieve its set goal, after which some valuable recommendations were made with respect to how best to capitalise on the positive features of COMSKIP.

In the process of accessing the achievements of COMSKIP, we found out the following: i) that there was limited synchronicity between the people who conceived COMSKIP and those who executed it; ii) that COMSKIP failed to address the already existing problems of UOE such as: a) non-existence of a strong academic philosophy informing the UOE curriculum and b) putting in place a sound UOE teacher-education programme for sustenance and continuity of the project. iii) that other problems that plagued COMSKIP and militated against its complete success include: (a) a lack of understanding on the part of the initiators of COMSKIP of the social milieu and (b) the use of double standards in their operations.

However, the whole drama is not a continuous tale of woes as we found that: i) COMSKIP succeeded for once in boosting the morale of the UOE teachers. ii) It created a national awareness of the herculean tasks involved in the teaching of communication skills in a depressed economy. iii) It articulated the tremendous prospects and promise which a revived UOE curriculum holds for the Nigerian undergraduate and iv) It has laid the foundation for collaboration amongst UOE teachers.

For a more effective UOE operation and lasting impact of COMSKIP we suggest the following: i) having a good pedagogic philosophy for the programme; ii) organise a strong UOE teachers education programme and iii) founding a centre for English Language Studies.

In addition to the above, we are suggesting that the idea of whole language be tried particularly in the areas of collaborative learning, portfolio assessment, workshop model and students' self monitoring.

COMSKIP: What Really Went Wrong?

I.O. Aim

In this paper we shall try to do two things. First, we shall try to x-ray the Communication Skills Project (COMSKIP). In the x-ray we shall try to examine the genesis, operations, achievements and limitations of COMSKIP. Secondly, we shall, based on the observed limitations of COMSKIP, offer some suggestions which we feel can revitalise teaching and learning in the Use of English (UOE) curriculum - the primary aim of COMSKIP.

1.1 The Genesis of COMSKIP

It is an up-hill task for the Nigerian undergraduate to acquire initiative, creativity, problem-solving expertise and the ability to effectively receive and give information in English. Two reasons inform our above contention. In the first place, at the pre university level i.e at the primary and secondary school levels, there is limited forum for the English as a second language (ESL) student to practice the use of English. This is because the Nigerian ESL learners use mainly their mother tongues for routine and every day communication. English is used mainly during formal classroom sessions when English language usage and use are being taught formally. Thus the classroom is the only forum where the ESL student has any systematic practice in the use of English as a medium of communication. However, as Onukaogu (Forthcoming) has rightly pointed out:

> the lack of a political will to evolve and implement a dynamic and relevant national English language policy, preponderance of inexperienced and unqualified teachers of English language, inadequate English language textbooks and the absence of realia to meaningfully motivate and sustain learners' interest in English language, hinder any meaningful teaching of English in Nigerian primary and secondary schools. (Onukaogu forth-coming P.4).

The teaching of English language in these two levels of the Nigerian school system is so poorly done that

> it cannot be denied that students enter higher education with a poor background in English (Okezie-Ugbor, 1984 p. 62).

We would also like to posit that because of the poor language background with which the Nigerian ESL students enter the university, they are not able to benefit from the language experiences which are presented by the specialist texts they encounter. Their comprehension of such texts is therefore bound to

be hindered. Besides, they can not internalise maximally and optimally the information content of such texts. It is against this background of inadequate English language competence prior to their entry into Nigerian Universities (which are all English medium) that we did posit that it is extremely difficult for the Nigerian undergraduate to acquire initiative, creativity, problem solving expertise and ability to effectively receive and give information in English. Our position also is supported by Nigerian scholars in ESL acquisition who see English language competence as a basic and fundamental prerequisite for such high level expertise essential for learning in the university (Afolayan, 1984).

When the UOE was therefore imported into Nigeria in the sixties from America by the University of Nigeria Nsukka (Ubahakwe, 1990) the Nigerian academia saw it as a welcome innovation. The potentials and promise which the UOE curriculum held as a viable means of facilitating teaching and learning in Nigerian universities and also a means of achieving a technological breakthrough were immense. It was therefore not surprising that other Nigerian universities soon bought the Nsukka idea and adopted the UOE curriculum. UOE was made compulsory in all Nigerian universities as a requirement for the award of a degree.

The objectives of the UOE curriculum can be summarised as enabling the Nigerian undergraduates to acquire:

(i) the communicative competence he needs for successful living in the university environment.That is, the communicative competence he will need as an undergraduate to communicate with all the members- academic and non academic- of his university community.

(ii) the communicative competence he needs for receiving and giving information in his general and specialist field of learning.

(iii) the communicative competence he needs on the completion of his studies to successfully and effectively perform in his chosen career (Onukaogu, 1989·p111-112).

In this paper we view "competence as a system of processes which makes possible the interpretation, structuring and restructuring of communication messages to meet the needs of an infinite number of communication environments" (Sybil, forthcoming p4).

In spite of the great promise which UOE holds and in spite of the great enthusiasm with which it was embraced by Nigerian universities, research evidence in the late seventies and early eighties called to serious question the entire UOE curriculum. It was clear that the goals for which UOE was established were not being attained. For instance, Onukaogu (1989) lamented the strong evidence of the poor comprehension abilities of the products.

Adetugbo (1973) pointed out that even after completing the course, the vast majority of Nigerian undergraduates "finds it difficult to distinguish between I lived and I have lived " (Adetugbo, 1973 p.73). The disillusionment which the Nigerian academia feel about the UOE curriculum can be illustrated in these three other instances. First according to Abe (1984),

> "The performance of students in verbal communication leaves much to be desired. The 'Use of English' is on the list of courses for B.Ed language Arts, but one wonders what purpose it serves and how much advantage students derive from it when students a few months away from graduation present essays such as the ones in the Appendix (Abe, 1984, p. 172).

Secondly, Afolayan laments the overall impact of the failure of the UOE curriculum on higher education as he contends that;

> "the failure contributes immensely to the failure of the higher educational programmes. This is reflected in the non development of the individuals who are the products of the higher education (Afolayan, 1984, p. 46).

Thirdly, referring specifically to the low reading ability of the students, " as a national crisis because of the pervasive nature of poor academic performance in higher institution, of learning nationwide." (Tinuoye. 1991, p. 73), Tinuoye agrees succinctly with the view that the country invests in educational failure rather than in success.

In order to resuscitate the UOE curriculum, the British Overseas Development Administration set up COMSKIP as a lifeline to UOE. According to the project document, " the aims of this project is to improve the communicative skills in English of Nigerian Federal University students in order to increase the effectiveness of manpower development and technology transfer through undergraduate education" (COMSKIP document 1988 p.1).

2. Some of the specific objectives of COMSKIP include:

(i) To develop the academic and administrative competence of those responsible for communication skills programme

(ii) To maintain and improve the effectiveness of such programmes within the general framework of English Studies in Faculties of Arts, Education and Schools of General Studies

(iii) To increase the relevance of such programmes to the proven needs of students in key areas of development, particularly in science and technology

(iv) To improve contacts between Nigeria and British specialists in the field.

(v) To strengthen collaboration between the Nigerian institutions pursuing related programmes.

(vi) Through selected centres, to improve access to teaching and learning resources developed in Britain.

(COMSKIP project document 1988 p.1).

1.2 The Operation of COMSKIP

The ODA provided the materials, special advisers and the funds needed for COMSKIP. The British Council was charged with the responsibility of overseeing COMSKIP on behalf of the ODA. The Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) was charged with Co-ordinating the project in all Federal Universities. There was a national COMSKIP committee. The committee was drawn from the participating universities, the NUC and the British Council. There was a national co-ordinator of the project who served as a bridge between the NUC, the British council and the participating universities.

Each university had a chairman- the Vice Chancellor of the university. The chairman had a project leader usually the head of the department which COMSKIP was affiliated with in the university. There was also a project officer who was expected to liaise with all the members of the project team in the university. The project team in each university consisted of seven staff members who as teachers of UOE were expected to translate at the grassroot level the operations of COMSKIP.

All the participating universities were divided into three zones. There was the Northern zone comprising Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Ado Bayero University, Kano, University of Jos, Jos, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi and Usman Dan Fodio University Sokoto. The University of Technology Yola and the University of Agriculture Makurdi later joined the Northern zone when the project was expanded to include both Universities of Agriculture and Technology. There was also an Eastern Zone comprising the University of Nigeria Nsukka, University of Calabar, Calabar, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt and was later joined by the University of Technology Owerri. Finally, the Western zone was made up of University of Ibadan, Ibadan, the Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife, The University of Lagos and was later joined by the University of Technology Akure and the University of Agriculture Abeokuta. The coordinator for the

Northern zone was Kano, the Eastern zone Nsukka and Ibadan for the Western zone.

The project started off with a trip to Britain of all the project officers. There were two zonal and national workshops.Then another trip to Britain, this time by the project leaders and the National co-ordinator. During the zonal and national workshops, current issues and trends in communication skills teaching were examined. Consultants on English for Academic Purposes were brought by the British Council from Britain to oversee the workshops. Books and electronic teaching aids were made available to the participating universities during the workshop. Follow-up workshops were expected in all the participating universities. The project was rounded up with the international conference of UOE held at the University of Nigeria Nsukka in 1993.

1.3 The Achievements of COMSKIP

There is no doubt that COMSKIP was a big boost to the UOE curriculum. It enhanced the morale of UOE teachers who for the first time since the establishment of the programme felt very proud to be associated with UOE.. The stigma that was associated with UOE that it had no academic status (Afolayan, 1984) seemed to have been mitigated by COMSKIP. COMSKIP also created a national awareness of the herculean tasks that are associated with the teaching of communication skills in stressed Third World economies. The zonal and national workshops not only created the awareness of the problems but also articulated vividly the tremendous prospects and promise which a revived UOE curriculum can have in enabling the Nigerian undergraduate to acquire creativity, initiative and problem solving expertise and the ability to effectively receive and give information in English.

COMSKIP for the first time in the history of UOE brought together UOE teachers from all over the country for a cross fertilization of ideas. COMSKIP has thus laid the foundation for regional and national collaborative studies in UOE. If this foundation is effectively sustained, it would augur well for the development and promotion of communication skill teaching and learning in Nigerian Universities. Since " through research collaboration, teachers have discovered new insights, new understandings of what research can help teachers accomplish, and new desires to serve their district primarily in staff development activities" (Porter, 1990 p. 88), collaboration which COMSKIP has capitalised on should go beyond the individual to the institutional level.

We will like to posit that one of the most important achievements of COMSKIP is the proof that training plays a vital role in the performance of UOE teachers. Onukaogu (1991) has proved empirically that those UOE teachers who participated in COMSKIP workshops at the zonal and unit level, were more effective

in enhancing (a) result-oriented interactions, (b) classroom management skills and also in (c) facilitating the achievement rates of their students.

We can now contend that any investments made in the training of UOE teachers is a step in the right direction. It is our candid view that COMSKIP would have achieved and resuscitated the derailed UOE curriculum had there not been certain oversights in the conceptualization and development of the project. We are of the opinion that unless these oversights are corrected and quickly too, the remarkable achievements of COMSKIP would frizzle out and the status quo ante COMSKIP would continue to prevail.

2.0 Some Limitations in COMSKIP

Although COMSKIP was wound up in 1993 with the international conference on UOE which was held in the University of Nigeria Nsukka, we are not pleased to observe that some of the basic problems which plagued the UOE curriculum and which actually led to its derailment are still very much with us. We are of the view that COMSKIP failed to address five vital issues which to us are crucial to the development and sustainance of a robust UOE curriculum.

In the first place, we have observed that COMSKIP did not address the issue of what philosophy should inform the UOE curriculum. Secondly, the machinery for the development and sustainance of a sound UOE teacher education programme which should provide the manpower needed for the continuity of the project was skipped. Thirdly, it is clear that the social milieu under which UOE operates was taken for granted in the conceptualization and implementation of COMSKIP. Fourthly, we would like to comment that there was limited synchronicity underlying the approach to be adopted between those who conceived COMSKIP on the one hand and those who implemented COMSKIP on the other hand. Finally, there is overwhelming evidence to show that as regards the human factor COMSKIP unapologetically adopted double standards. These double standards were responsible for the low morale that almost ruined COMSKIP when the implementation stage started in Nigeria. Since a failure to redress the above limitations of COMSKIP can be fatal to the sustenance of a revived UOE curriculum, we will try to examine each of them.

2.1 UOE : Which Philosophical Underpinnings?

An inherent weakness in the UOE curriculum is the complete absence of a philosophy which informs it and which is in accordance with the way humans learn language and develop it. Three areas where this weakness are most noticeable are in (i) the status of UOE, (ii) the role of literature and (iii) the pedagogic approach in

the teaching of UOE.

The tradition today in all Nigerian Universities is to regard UOE as a mere enrichment programme, a kind of extra information source which is not at all basic to University learning. As Afolayan (1984) has rightly pointed out, it is fatal to regard UOE as a mere enrichment programme. This is because UOE is a very enhancing academic discipline which needs a sound, sustainable, virile, intensive and extensive tradition of search and research if it is to be used to achieve the desired objectives of enabling the Nigerian undergraduates to acquire creativity, initiative, problem-solving expertise and the ability to effectively receive and give information in English (Onukaogu 1989). Unfortunately, COMSKIP failed to address this issue in its workshop themes and publications. Today the trend is very alive in all Nigerian Universities: UOE is a mere enrichment programme and not an academic programme. This situation raises a number of questions. Will it ever be possible to attract into the UOE curriculum high level manpower? Will there ever be a time when provisions will be made for research into various facets of the curriculum? If such a widely acclaimed international project as COMSKIP failed to articulate the need to give UOE an academic status, whatthen will?

In the implementation of the UOE curriculum the resources available in the department of Literature in English are never utilized. This is because what is emphasized is the mechanistic atomization of the four language skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing. Since no role is accorded to Literature in English, provisions are not at all made for the utilisation of expository, narrative and trade books to boost learning and teaching. Since we can not fault Cullinan's contention that

> children learn to read by actually reading and not by doing exercises; reading is a part of language and is learned the same way as are other forms of language and learning in any one area of language helps in other areas. Good Literature is clearly the Foundation of an effective language program, and is central to reading and writing in whole language classrooms (Underlining ours) (Cullinan, 1993 p. xii)

do we still have any basis for not including literature in the UOE curriculum? The absence of Literature in English has done more harm than good to the UOE curriculum. This is because it makes learning too mechanistic and devoid of the natural way humans learn language. We completely agree that;

> Literature - rich environments focus on functional and purposeful activities that guide and foster children to (i) take risks while learning and make decisions about learning (ii) self assess how and what they learn and (iii) learn to think about ideas and write them independently (Glazer, 1993, p. 20).

We hold the view that what is true for children's literature is also true for UOE students. We also agree that "frequent and positive contact with books creates interest in reading; increased interest results in more reading; more reading results in better reading" (Cullihan, 1992 p.xiii). COMSKIP by not involving the various departments in Literature in English in our universities and by not paying attention to the role of Literature in the acquisition of English Language competence in typical ESL environments like Nigeria gave credence to the attitude that literature is after all not needed in the UOE curriculum.

Still on the issue of philosophy, we feel that another area COMSKIP should have articulated one is in the area of which pedagogical attitude to adopt. We seem convinced that the success recorded by the English language centre of the King Abdulaziz University Jedda was because the centre had a well articulated and unambiguous pedagogic philosophy. The centre adopted the philosophy

> that the more one does something, the better one gets at doing it. ELC programmes are then based on the premise of learning by doing (Wilson, 1986 p. 8).

The philosophy informed "all the work undertaken at the centre, generating the teaching and learning activities of the staff and students" (Wilson 1986 p.7). Certain basic operations in communication skills teaching and learning can not be effectively carried out if the philosophy which informs them are not clear.

For instance, as Wilson (1988) has rightly pointed out task-based learning models and structural-based learning models have different approaches to the learning and teaching phenomenon because the philosophies which underpin them are different. Similarly Hutchinson and Waters (1985) have argued that the type of course one designs is predicated by the type of language approach one adopts. There is therefore no doubt that the philosophy underlining a given curriculum is instrumental to its effectiveness or non effectiveness. Unfortunately, UOE teachers who are besieged by a plethora of approaches and models can not choose the most relevant models because there is no pedagogic philosophy in the curriculum which should inform their choice.

2.2. Lack of a Teacher-Education Programme

In spite of the acknowledged role of training in enhancing the performance of UOE teachers, as spelt out in the project document:

> It is intended to carry out the above through improving resources in the Nigerian Federal Universities, and provide training both in the country and Britain, on two levels - on the Use of English teachers and on a more theoretical level, applied linguistics training for those working in departments (COMSKIP Document, 1988 p.1).

COMSKIP did not see the need to seriously address the issue of a teacher education programme for UOE teachers. Such a programme would have been the instrument for providing the needed specialist manpower that could have provided continuity on the completion of COMSKIP. Unfortunately in item 3.32 of the project document teacher- education was made an exclusion:

> 3.32 This project will not focus specifically on language teacher education, though many of those ultimately benefiting from communication skills development will become teachers of English and of other subjects (underlining ours. Project document p.4).

We are aware that there is a sense in which the entire COMSKIP is a training programme. It made participants aware of current trends in the teaching of communication skills as well as issues at stake in the effective realization of the goals and objectives of COMSKIP. All the same we feel that the inability of COMSKIP to develop a sound and sustainable teacher education programme for UOE teachers is not illuminating. We completely agree with Jaggers that teachers do not change by merely informing them of the need to change. According to Jaggers:

> We must recognise that learning takes place from inside out and not outside in. Neither teachers nor those they teach change simply by giving them information, by being told about theory and research or new approaches. Unfortunately, we often equate knowledge with information. Language and literacy instruction won't improve in our schools if we continue to hold unto the idea that all

> teachers need is more information and everything they will get better. Information is necessary, but it is not a sufficient condition for change (Jaggers, 1989 p.78).

Jaggers' position completely faults COMSKIP because all COMSKIP did was to inform UOE teaches of the need to change through exposure to current practice. Besides, we recognise that:

> Change takes time and energy. It does not take place overnight, or as the result of a one day workshop at the beginning of the school year - a limited and common approach to staff development. Professional growth and development should be an ongoing process that is an integral part of the life of a school (Jaggers, 1989 P. 79).

We therefore posit that there is the need for an all embracing teacher education programme.

The need for a sound teacher-education programme specifically designed to meet the needs of communication skills (like UOE) teachers is also stressed by Welsh (1989) who contends that:.

> When we get to the bottom-line, teachers make or break a programme. If they believe in what one is asked to do, if they are given opportunities to verbalize and resolve their professional conflicts, if they are supported rather than dictated to by the school leadership and if they are sufficiently trained, the programme will succeed. If these ifs are not met interest in the programme will stop outside the classroom door (Welsh, 1989 p.67).

We risk the professional development of our UOE teachers by not putting in place for them a sound and sustainable teacher education programme.

2.3 Limited Synchronicity

One serious limitation of COMSKIP is the limited synchronicity between the goals and objectives of those who conceived COMSKIP on the one hand with the goals and objectives of those who implemented COMSKIP. While those who conceived COMSKIP as expressed in the project document were interested in enhancing the indigenous programme UOE, those involved in the implementation of COMSKIP were more interested in transplanting and installing ESP/EAP in the Nigerian university system. To them ESP/EAP provides the panacea

to the problems inhibiting communication skills teaching in English in Nigerian universities. Two reasons inform our position. First at the end of the zonal and national workshop in UOE the professional organization that emerged to cater for UOE teachers is the Nigerian Association of Lecturers for English for Academic Purposes - NALEAP. This of course shows a preference for the British model (BALEAP). We feel that is unfair to the UOE curriculum. What was needed was a Nigerian Association of Lecturers of Use of English (NALOUE) and not NALEAP. Secondly, we find that the presentations and demonstrations during the zonal and national workshops were oriented towards ESP/EAP. For instance, of the four books published by the project - the COMSKIP publication series (CPS) two of them CPS No. 1 and CPS No. 4 are publications on EAP. As a matter of fact the syllabus that emerged at the end of the COMSKIP is an EAP and not a UOE syllabus titled: EAP Syllabus for Nigerian Universities CPS No.4.

The subtle replacement of UOE with EAP by COMSKIP was absolutely uncalled for. The problems which harmstrung the effectiveness of UOE are not peculiar to communication skills teaching in Nigeria. For instance, in the United States of America communication skills teaching faces similar problems. Commenting on ESL the programme designed for communication skills, Gaies (1991) says:

> Even more problematic is the fact that in many institutions, the ESL programme is not a full partner. In instructional policy-making and decision making, the issue is not simply whether ESL course-work is credit bearing or not. It has to do in many cases with the very location and design of the programme. It is often isolated from the academic sector by being placed under the administration of a continuing education programme. It often suffers the stigma of being the poor relation in the family.It is viewed as something peripheral to the real work of the academy (Gaies, 1991 p.33).

It is instructive to note that the Americans have not replaced their communication skills programme - ESL - with EAP. Rather they confront the situation through research and seek pragmatic solutions based on their current understanding of the issues at stake (Auerback, 1991).

In any case we do not see the basis for replacing UOE with EAP. Such a replacement merely succumbs to the myth of transience which

> suggests that by putting into effect a particular programme or testing procedure, the problems will be addressed and higher education will be more alive to resume real work (Zamel 1991 p.16).

The myth of transience shifts the blame of the failure of the programme from the institutions to the programme. If the failure of the UOE curriculum is to be solved, the variables involved in the programme - both human and non-human need to be addressed.

Since current research findings in communication skills teaching call to question the ESP/EAP approach we are more wary of the subtle replacement of UOE with EAP. EAP is informed by both skill - specific and discipline - specific approaches to language teaching. For example in the English language centre of King Abdulaziz University where ESP/EAP is adopted, a basic principle which informs the ESP/EAP approach is:

> The English programme should train students in communication skills demanded of them by their subject studies. Accepting the validity of learning by doing, a logical consequence of this position is that <u>no communicative demand should be made of a student by the English programme which is not also made by the Faculty courses</u> (underlining ours) (Wilson, 1986 p.8).

We do not support the formulaic or generic discipline-specific approach because they "require students to undertake discipline-specific writing without making room for their own developing views, perspective, framework, however idiosyncratic, tentative and unconventional these may be (Zamel, 1991 p.14). Such approaches raise a number of questions since according to Zamel "they privilege academic discourse over students' personal attempts to respond and fail to recognise that the processes of struggle and negotiation... are central to the making of meaning in academic communities" (Zamel, 1991 p.14). Zamel also argues that teaching discipline-specific models of writing is exclusionary because it assumes that students must learn linguistic forms of a community before or without becoming part of it" (Zamel, 1991 p.14).

We also do not share the pre-occupation of ESP/EAP with skills based instruction because we agree completely that

> because it is shaped by reductive and mechanistic assumptions about language and reading and writing developments, because it assumes that students need to learn basic constituent skills, (skills that necessarily

> come prior to reading and writing) and because it presents skills stripped of the very context that gives meaning and importance - keeps students outside of the academic context based conversation that they are trying to take part in (Zamel 1991 p.14).

We see the subtle replacement of UOE with EAP as an attempt to perpetuate British traditional methodology and dominance. This to us is definitely not in the interest of a vibrant and robust development of the UOE curriculum.

2.3 The Social Milieu of COMSKIP

Those who conceived COMSKIP did not take into consideration the social milieu of the UOE curriculum. Thus in many cases COMSKIP became a victim of the dirty local politics in various Nigerian Universities. For instance there were no objective criteria used in choosing those who served as project officers. Many of them if not all had never taught UOE and the few who did had done so in the distant past that they were complete aliens to the developments in the curriculum. If a careful survey is made of the proceedings in the zonal and national workshops it will be found that many of the project officers made no contributions. The choice of the various committees to represent the interest of COMSKIP at the grassroot level did not follow any objective criteria. Many who were in the committees were friends of the project leaders and officers. They had no vision and commitment for and to UOE. It will be interesting to know if any planning sessions were ever held by these committees. Information dissemination at the grassroot level in order to achieve the expected multipler effect so that those who did not attend the zonal or national workshop would get to know the operations of COMSKIP was not effected. Thus information about COMSKIP was restricted to the committee members who incidentally were paid to attend the workshops. Thus the majority of the UOE teachers especially the part time teachers have never been enthusiastic about COMSKIP. They were ill-informed about it.

The criteria for selecting the Departments where COMSKIP was based and the zonal centres for COMSKIP are questionable. For instance, why was the school of preliminary studies in Jos chosen as the COMSKIP unit. That school is a secondary school and not part of the university. The hostility from the Department of English and the Faculty of Education in that university to COMSKIP is therefore understandable. In the case of the University of Jos a secondary school teacher who had no business with UOE was selected to Joss the University teachers who actually taught the course. Besides, why was it that in the Western zone the University of Ibadan which had just introduced the teaching of UOE was asked to be the centre. The Obafemi Awolowo University which had introduced UOE over two decades before COMSKIP and which had

the largest concentration of Applied English Linguists in Nigeria was side-lined.

Finally, it is sad that COMSKIP did not take cognisance of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which was in place in Nigeria. SAP had meant very limited funding to the universities. Thus it was definitely unfair to ask the NUC to fund any aspect of COMSKIP because the NUC were not in a position to do so. Thus since the back up funds from the NUC was not forth-coming many aspects of COMSKIP were not implemented. For instance, it is sad to note that the pre-test and post-test aspects which were essential for the effective evaluation of COMSKIP were not implemented. It is also amazing that COMSKIP struck tenaciously to her three-year schedule. The heart of the matter is that because of SAP, Nigerian Universities were shut indiscriminately due to students' unrest. Thus the actual period COMSKIP was in operation if we go by the period the universities were open was less than three years.

We are of the view that if COMSKIP had set up an autonomous body and centre that would have overseen and funded the project independent of the universities, COMSKIP would have been insulated from the events in the universities which hindered it considerably.

2.4 The Double Standards in Human Relations

It is sad to observe that the yardsticks used by COMSKIP in treating the personnel involved in the project were to the least very awful. While the British consultants who were flown into Nigeria were given considerable comfort and adequately renumerated for their services to COMSKIP the same was not true for their Nigerian counterparts. Those of us, UOE teachers who served as resource personnel were given just pittance. Besides, when our project leaders were invited to Britain to examine parallel projects being overseen by the University of Reading, they were treated with disdain even when there were some very long standing Professors amongst them. It took the strong protest of the team before some reasonable accommodation and feeding were provided them. The double standard adopted by those charged to oversee COMSKIP was definitely one of the factors responsible for the very low morale of those who participated in COMSKIP from the Nigerian end. Definitely the low morale did not make COMSKIP tick.

3.0 Suggestions on How to Capitalise on the Gains of COMSKIP

In order to make the UOE curriculum serve as an effective means of enabling the Nigerian undergraduate to have the competence for effectively giving and receiving information in the university, three minimum requirements must be met. First the issue of a sound pedagogic philosophy based on the way humans learn must be adopted. Such a pedagogic philosophy must treat UOE as an academic discipline. It must lend the UOE curriculum to search and research

and must be backed by current research findings on communications skills teaching from different parts of the world and not just restricted to the British point of view. Such a philosophy must promote the use of literature in enhancing the language experiences of the students. Secondly, the issue of an appropriate teacher-education programme for UOE teachers must be thoroughly addressed. Success in any communication skills programme is hinged on the effectiveness of the teacher (Jaggers 1989, Welsh, 1989). Common sense teaches us that teaching competence is basic in teacher effectiveness. That is to say that we cannot expect a teacher to be effective if the teacher lacks teaching competence. Our sad experiences in the UOE curriculum has shown that teaching competence is one of the most ignored variables in the UOE curriculum. This is not strange, for as Berliner has pointed out "common sense is not common practice (Berliner, 1981, p.224)". If we must evolve common practice, then we must put in place a sound teacher-education programme that can enhance teaching competence. Finally, we must have a centre that is specifically set aside to enhance studies in English Language learning and teaching.

3.1. A Pedagogic Philosophy for UOE

In order to make UOE curriculum bounce back to life, Afolayan (1984) suggests the hierarchical development of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills along two levels: an elementary level and an advanced level. Some of the British Council resource materials provided to boost UOE also endorse an atomization of English Language along the four sacred skills. For instance, a cursory look at these titles: Academic Writing Course R.R. Jordan 1980; Text to Note A.Adkins and Y. Mckeen 1983; Writing: T. Hedge, 1988; Listening A. Andersen and T. Lynch 1988. Teaching Listening Comprehension: Penny Ur 1984; Developing Reading Skills F. Grellet 1981 and Writing Laboratory Reports T.D. Evans 1985, will confirm this support for the atomistic and hierarchical teaching of communication skills along the four "sacred skills".

We do not however support either of the approaches - Afolayan (1984) and the British Council. This is because both fail to take cognisance of current trends in language acquisition which show that language is best learnt in whole and not in parts. We completely agree with Goodman's contention that

> language is actually learned from whole to part. We first use whole utterances in familiar situations. Then later we see and develop parts and begin to experiment with their relationship to each other and to the meaning of the whole. The whole is always more than the sum of the parts and the value of any part can only be learned within the whole utterance in any real speech event (Goodman, 1986 p.19).

We would like to suggest that if a whole language philosophy is adopted for UOE, it will help to redress the pitfalls already observed in the curriculum. Whole language is a philosophy that is supported by extensive academic tradition (Goodman, 1986). It will have a positive academic research transfer value to UOE. Besides, whole language makes extensive use of literature. It will therefore introduce into the UOE curriculum a rich literature base.

Whole language is not a model or a technique/method of teaching. It is

> a philosophy rich in implication for the classroom. It is a sharing of reading and writing, speaking and listening centred around matters of genuine importance to learners (Altwerger, 1988 p.2).

One of the strong theses that informs whole language is "that the school curriculum needs to be a dual curriculum that integrates Language and Thinking development with the development of knowledge" (Goodman, 1987p.1). That is why "whole language teachers are professionals who have a strong holistic belief system about teaching and learning and who recognise a need for a theoretical base to use in putting their beliefs into action" (Goodman 1987 p.1). Whole language adopts a holistic conceptualization of language teaching because there in now abundant research evidence that shows that "reading and writing are learned through students' active integration and not disintegration of the systems of language" (Watson and Stevenson, 1989 p.120). As a matter of fact, "whole language teachers think of the classroom as a learning context in which the total physical environments and all actions and interactions teach literacy" (Pinnel, 1989 p.105). One useful advantage whole language can develop in UOE students is that it can enable them to acquire the ability to adopt a holistic approach to problem-solving. Rose (1991) reinforces our position through his view:

> To find solutions for the more complex problem today and in the future and to be able to foresee other problems that may be created by short sighted solutions, we must be taught to gather and process information from a wide variety of fields. Educational futurists contend that the best way to teach this skill is by a form of integrated education (Rose, 1991 p.2).

Integrated teaching is a basic technique in whole language. We hold the view that a whole language philosophy in the UOE curriculum will be a viable way of training UOE students to effectively and holistically tackle their problems.

If the whole language philosophy is adopted it will boost the use of literature in the UOE curriculum. UOE teachers can then draw from the rich tradition of whole language

> where teachers use a rich variety of literature and print books (fictional, informational and poetic), magazines, newspapers etc and have students write for real purpose - journals, letters, notes, lists, poems; stories, observations and descriptions. They avoid workbooks, drill sheets and writing through fragmentation and simulations. Whole language teachers know that children learn to love reading through their experiences with rich literature and they become writers through the process of meaningful writing (Altwerger, 1988 p.2).

3.2. A UOE Teacher-Education Programme

If UOE is to have and retain an academic status, then those who teach it, must not be recruited ad hoc. They should be a body of professionals who have undergone the rigours of an academic discipline specifically tailored to give them teaching competence in the teaching of UOE. Thomas (1988) has argued that effective English language teaching entails three minimum competences. These are (i) Usage and Use i.e linguistic and communicative competences (ii) English language awareness i.e competence to describe English Usage and the use and (iii) Pedagogic competence i.e ability to effectively teach English language competence. The competences do not happen by chance. They must be learnt.

Besides, Onukaogu (1991) has shown that training makes the UOE teachers effective. There is also some evidence to show that when a teacher is aware of the expected competences of the UOE, s/he becomes more effective than if s/he is not aware of them. There is some evidence to show that the sex, mode of employment - whether part or full time - and the educational qualification of the UOE teacher are not significant determinants of the measure of competence of the UOE teacher (Onukaogu, Forthcoming). From the available research evidence, we are inclined to conclude that there is now an urgent need for a UOE Teacher-Education Programme which can provide the training that will enable the UOE teacher to internalize a systematic body of knowledge, skills and attitudes, utilise what has been internalized and be efficient in the attainment of the target learning goals (Cf Onukaogu, 1991).

Given the stragtegic position of the UOE teacher in the UOE curriculum, we feel that there is the need for us to rethink and put in place an appropriate teacher education programme that will adequately equip the UOE teacher for the onerous task s/he is called upon to accomplish.

We therefore completely agree with Wells' (1989) assertion:

> If teachers are to create classroom communities in which students learn through active, collaborative inquiry, they must have similar learning opportunities themselves. This means a major rethinking of teacher education, both preservice preparation and inservice professional development. New structures will need to be found within which teachers can take a more active role in their own learning and in shaping the curriculum for which they are responsible. And those outside the classroom - teachers, educational consultants, and administrations - will need to rethink their roles in order to be able to support this process. (Wells, 1989 P VI)

There is no doubt that Well's contentions are very relevant to both the UOE teacher and the UOE curriculum.

3.3 The Centre for English Language Studies

There is a need to have a centre for English Language Studies in Nigeria. This centre should serve as a clearing house and information dissemination regarding studies in English and Use of English. The centre should also conduct research on various aspects of UOE curriculum.. We need for instance to know more the process of acquiring UOE competence than the product of the competence. We need to know the affective dimensions of students' learning and of the teachers. Since we have recommended the adoption of the Whole Language philosophy, there is the need to know how such pivots of whole language like collaborative learning, portfolio assessment, workshop model and students' self monitoring can be adopted/adapted to enhance teaching and learning in UOE. The centre as a research centre should carry out the above identified studies and disseminate its findings. Finally, the centre should not only conduct short term in-service programme for UOE teachers but should also be a centre for producing and testing viable teaching aids for the UOE curriculum.

Conclusion

In this paper we have tried to show that there was a need to revitalise the UOE curriculum and make it more responsive to the needs of higher education in Nigeria. We also tried to show that the lifeline offered by ODA through the institutionalization of COMSKIP was very helpful. In many respects COMSKIP did put new life into the UOE curriculum. However, COMSKIP was constrained and did not achieve much because of the many factors in the UOE curriculum which were taken for granted. We tried to show how the factors impeded the lofty goals of COMSKIP. Finally, we proffered some suggestions which we believe can help enhance the goals of COMSKIP and revamp the UOE curriculum. The x-ray of COMSKIP in this paper shows the benefits of international cooperation and the continual interest of the British government in helping her erstwhile colonies. If the assistance which the British government offers is to be of optimal and maximal benefits to the colonies, then there is the need for Britain to understand more fully all the dimensions of the problems that are to be solved, understand the social millieu in the colonies, at least those in operation at the time the problems are being addressed, and take full cognisance of the national ego and psyche of the people so that the people would not see the help as subtle attempts to recolonise, subjugate and humiliate them. COMSKIP to our mind would definitely have fared much better if the various facets of the UOE curriculum had been fully comprehended by those who conceived and put it in place.

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